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DE RUEHSG #0767/01 2352050
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 222050Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3616
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 2075
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0392
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 1012
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ AUG LIMA 5643
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 1890
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMCSUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SANTIAGO 000767

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [CI](#)
SUBJECT: WHAT WE GOT HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE:
CHILE'S INDIGENOUS ISSUE

REF: SANTIAGO 733

Summary

1. (SBU) Photos of burned out farms and menacing masked gunmen, as well as strings of editorials bemoaning the GOC's failure to resolve the "Mapuche conflict," signal the recent return to the headlines of Chile's long-simmering "indigenous issue." Unlike in neighboring Peru and Bolivia, Chile's native indigenous are a relatively small five percent of overall population and Chilean governments - indeed Chilean society - have largely ignored indigenous demands to right perceived historical wrongs. Since the return to democracy in 1990, however, successive left-leaning Concertacion governments have made some effort to recognize indigenous culture and address their demands, typically through the restoration of "stolen lands," but also improved education and access to economic opportunity. Moderate indigenous leaders worry the "dialogue" with the GOC on these issues is a one-way conversation, with GOC programs imposed without sufficient input from affected communities. Extremists are convinced the GOC is paying lip service only and resort to violence to press demands. Indigenous leaders also differ with the GOC aim to build a "multicultural" Chile, preferring to establish an "inter-cultural" society. U.S. experience with its own native populations - the good and the bad - is viewed with interest and offers an avenue for U.S.-Chile cooperation. End summary.

2. (U) E/Pol Counselor August 18-20 visited Chile's Eighth and Ninth regions, spending most of his time in Temuco, capital of the latter, a region known also as "La Aracaunia," the historical land of the Mapuche indigenous peoples, Chile's largest native population. The Mapuche resisted Spanish colonization - indeed they were never subjugated - and even after Chilean independence from Spain in 1810, maintained effective sovereignty over their lands (south of the Bio-Bio river) until 1880. Over the past one hundred and thirty years, Mapuche integration into the larger Chilean society has been halting at best, beset by first overt and then latent discrimination, by loss of ancestral lands, by poverty and lack of educational opportunity, and by its own proud reluctance to assimilate fully. In the 1960's, the GOC made some efforts at land reform, a process reversed by the Pinochet dictatorship. When democracy was restored, the center-left Concertacion government of Patricio Alwyn renewed a commitment to integrating Chile's indigenous people (these include, inter alia, the Aymara in Chile's northern desert and the Rapa Nui on Easter Island). Since then,

successive Concertacion governments have proposed various programs to further this process, the most recent being the "Re-Conocer" (reacquaint) initiative launched by President Bachelet (reftel).

A Lack of Opportunity

¶3. (U) Joined by Alvaro Marifil, national director of the Corporation for Indigenous Development (CONADI), E/Pol Counselor met with a group of Mapuche leaders in a traditional "Ruka" (tribal home) located in the rural indigenous community of Antonio Alki, 15 kilometers outside Temuco. Lautero Llehue, the group's spokesman, said the community's poverty was linked to inequitable land distribution ("a family cannot survive on one hectare"), poor infrastructure (the road in from Temuco was unpaved and muddy), and lack of government investment in the region. A young leader added he believed the GOC was well-intentioned, but "not listening." The government, he said, arrives with a program - such as provision of young plants or seeds for growing - but then fails to ensure adequate irrigation. The crop fails, poverty continues, resources are wasted. If the GOC consulted with us, it would have a better understanding of community needs. Another participant noted that the bureaucracy had to be more flexible. On the land issue, for example, the notion of individual "ownership" was alien to Mapuche culture. Family groups or entire communities occupied land tracts, a concept not in keeping with Western views on legal title. (Note: The Mapuche are also

characterized by a diffuse leadership. A key difference between Chilean and Mapuche cultures is that the latter lacks a hierarchical structure. There is no single Mapuche leader or parliament who can make binding decisions on the "Mapuche nation.") E/Pol Counselor noted that public participation in government rule-making - as on environmental issues - is now common practice in the U.S. We need a similar system here, the group agreed, where community inputs would lead to more effective, less wasteful government decision-making.

A Spike in Violence

¶4. (SBU) Dominating E/Pol Counselor's conversations with the Intendencia (regional governor-equivalent, appointed by the GOC), the Mayor, the local bishop, and NGO's, was news of an attack August 17 against a land-owner, whose house had been burned down by unidentified persons. The man's property had been repeatedly targeted by assailants, who claim that his - and many other tracts of land (including those owned by multinational forestry interests) - had been stolen from the Mapuche. Such actions have been common since circa 2000, when the Coordinadora Arcaunia Mapuche (CAM) was founded. The CAM is a radical, left-wing group that purports to represent Mapuche interests. According to press reports, as well as Temuco interlocutors, most of the CAM leadership has been identified or jailed by GOC security forces. Nonetheless, the CAM remains active and claimed responsibility for the August 17 incident. GOC officials have expressed concern that the CAM may have ties to groups such as the FARC and the ETA.

¶5. (SBU) The attacks were uniformly condemned by all, although two NGO representatives added "but look at the context in which the acts take place." All agreed as well that the CAM represents only a tiny minority of Mapuche, if that. Several observed that the CAM may not even be all that interested in Mapuche land claims, using it as a pretext for more generalized complaints against globalization and the state writ large. Nonetheless, the CAM is using the issue to draw younger, disaffected (and poor) Mapuche into radical action. The uptick in attacks has also generated considerable editorial commentary over the GOC's failure "again" to adequately address the Mapuche conflict, including from the public security standpoint, a charge on which the

Bachelet administration is neuralgic, fearing it looks weak.

A Clash of Cultures

¶6. (SBU) Bishop Manuel Camilo was one of several interlocutors who argued that cultural misunderstanding was the driving force behind the indigenous conflict. Chile's native people in the north, for example, are perplexed by the Western concept of below ground ownership of mining rights. But these are clearly a valuable resource that are not being exploited by the Aymari. The same holds true for water rights. The Mayor of Temuco, Francisco Huenchumilla, himself of Mapuche descent, argued for a cultural shift on the part of the majority society, with recognition of Chile's multicultural reality. Huenchumilla insisted that the Mapuche also had to demand power - to include return of land but also political representation in parliament and government. A recognition of Mapuche culture and "right to power" would lead to greater investment in the region, helping raise standards of living.

¶7. (SBU) At the Universidad de la Frontera's respected Indigenous Institute, Director Alejandro Herrera took the "cultural clash" theme a step further. Herrera was highly critical of Concertacion's "neglect" of indigenous affairs charging that "only (first Concertacion president) Alwyn took a sincere interest;" subsequent administrations put people in charge of indigenous affairs who had no knowledge of the issue "or had not even met an indigenous person." Herrera also claimed that perhaps only 5-6 percent of funds marked for indigenous affairs reached intended recipients, with the rest lost to administrative costs and corruption. His strongest criticism was, however, aimed at the key concept in the Bachelet's "Re-Conocer" program - promoting a

multicultural Chile. Mapuche (and other indigenous populations) argue for an "inter-cultural" society. This requires first an acknowledgement by the majority society that indigenous culture and society was damaged (beginning in 1492) and that recompense is due. Once that step is taken, the "construction" of an inter-cultural society can begin. Herrera allowed that recompense would necessarily fall short of indigenous claims ("we can't go back to how things were") but the process would allow a relationship that recognizes and accepts differences "amongst equals."

Education the Answer

¶8. (U) Several interlocutors said poverty sprang from a lack of land and, to a lesser degree, discrimination in access to opportunity. But all were in agreement that a "miserable" educational system was the key factor in maintaining the cycle of poverty. Huenchumilla and Herrera both noted that so-called GOC "scholarships" for indigenous provided a stipend of CHF 40,000/month (USD 80.00) living expenses. The GOC had to invest much more heavily in real scholarships for indigenous youth, including sending them abroad. But it was also critical to build infrastructure and better prepare teachers working in indigenous regions. Bishop Camilo noted that Mapuche excelled in school when given the opportunity.

The American Experience

¶9. (U) E/Pol Counselor repeatedly offered that the U.S.'s more than 200-years-long-relationship with its own native American population - the negative and the positive - could provide a useful base of knowledge from which Chile could draw. The U.S. experience included both federal and state level interaction with native populations. Juan Jorge Faundez of the Fundacion Instituto Indigena (an NGO associated with the Catholic Church) suggested that U.S. tribes with expertise in sustainable development could be one

area for exchange. Hererra and Jaime Lopez of the Public Defenders' office both thought that U.S. tribal experience with autonomous court systems would be another. Herrara suggested as well that exchanges with the Menomonee tribe in Wisconsin, with its experience in management of forest/timber resources would be useful (much of Mapuche land is heavily forested). Other U.S. experience not linked specifically to indigenous issues - such as encouraging public participation in law/rule-making - would also be welcome. So, too, would efforts by indigenous groups in the U.S. to develop non-traditional industries such as, but not limited to, the gaming industry.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) At first glance, much of the conflict in the Ninth Region seems to reflect the realities of the still ongoing shift of populations from rural to urban areas. The complaints aired in Antonio Alka - lack of opportunity, children that can't be kept down on the farm - can be heard as well in many small Nebraska towns. But in the end, Paul Newman's iconic lament rings true. The Chilean majority population views the "Mapuche conflict" as a security issue, or perhaps an economic problem that can be addressed (reluctantly) with money. It is certainly not a recognition of legitimate, deeply rooted grievances, much less of a legitimately equivalent culture. Indeed, the fact that all indigenous are lumped together, in many minds, as "Mapuche" suggests the level of incomprehension of cultures speaking past each other. Majority Chileans would like nothing better than for the "Mapuche" to assimilate. And the Mapuche, with their long history of resisting integration, are not likely to do so. The tale is not all bleak, however. Most indigenous want to talk out their grievances; to sit and dialogue in Mapuche culture, for example, is sometimes as important as the solution. The USG might be able to facilitate a conversation in which Chile's indigenous voices can be heard by the majority Chilean society. End comment.
SIMONS